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Adults with *Below Basic* and *Basic* Literacy:

Results from the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)

A webcast presentation

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What is the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)?

- Assessment of the English literacy of U.S. adults
- Conducted in 1992 and 2003
- Nationally representative sample of more than 19,000 adults age 16 and older
- One-on-one administration in households and prisons

NAAL definition of literacy

“The ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential”

Three types of literacy



■ Prose



■ Document



■ Quantitative

Why focus on adults with *Below Basic* and *Basic* literacy?

- The 2003 NAAL allows finer distinctions in performance at the low end by developing a new:
 - *Nonliterate in English* category
 - Supplemental assessment
 - Oral reading fluency assessment
- Data on adults with limited literacy have the potential to help adult education and other programs
- Sixty percent of all new jobs will require a 2- or 4-year college degree



Results

**From the 2003
National Assessment of
Adult Literacy**

Sample document task: receipt for certified mail

- 80 million adults were unable to enter the provided name and address correctly

P 138 573 931

RECEIPT FOR CERTIFIED MAIL
NO INSURANCE COVERAGE PROVIDED
NOT FOR INTERNATIONAL MAIL

Sent to	
Street and No.	
P.O., State and ZIP Code	
Postage	\$
Certified Fee	
Special Delivery Fee	
Restricted Delivery Fee	
Return Receipt showing to whom and Date Delivered	
Return Receipt showing to whom, Date, and Address of Delivery	
TOTAL Postage and Fees	\$
Postmark or Date	

PS FORM 3800, June 1985

Fold at line over top of envelope to the right of the return address.

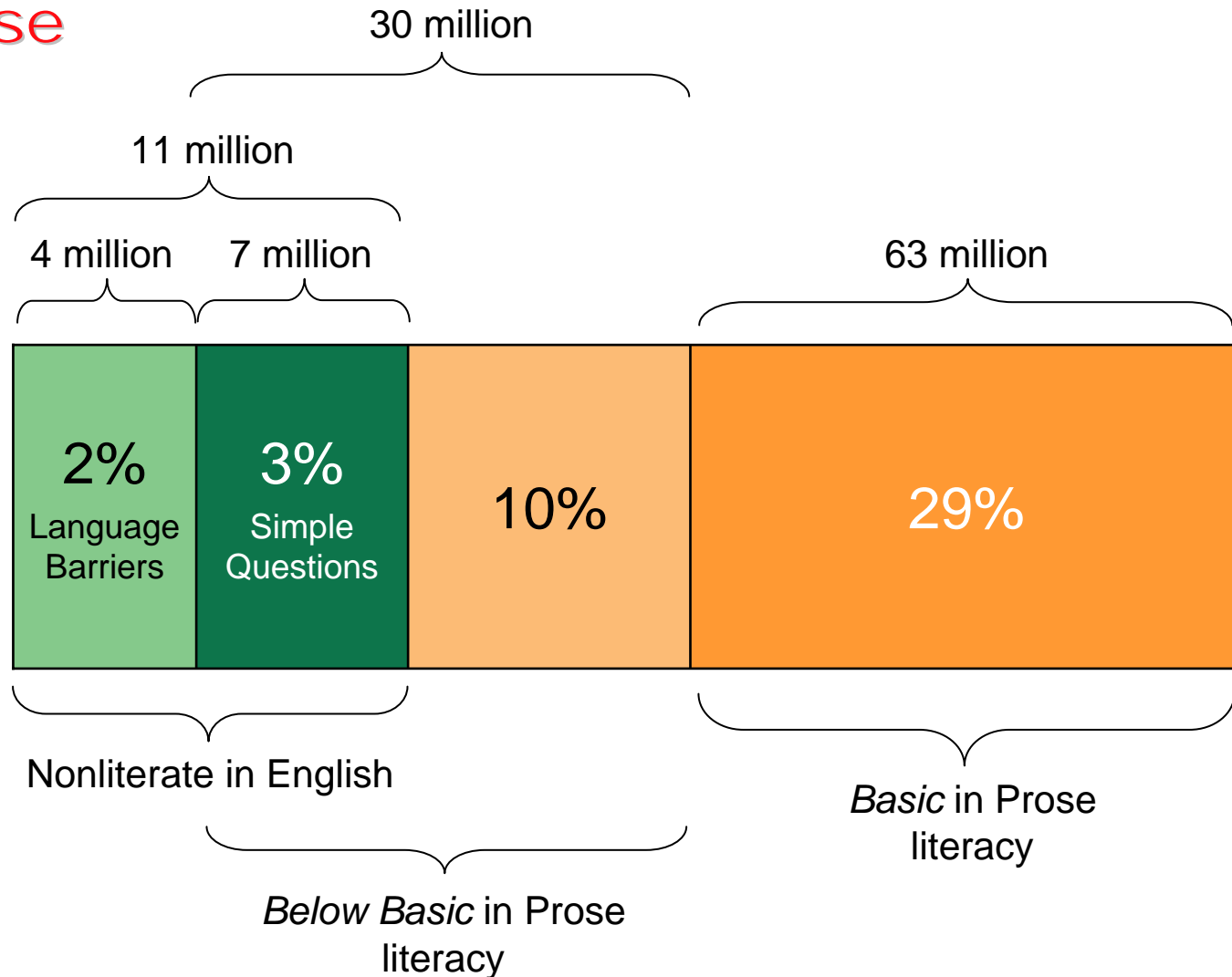
CERTIFIED

P 138 573 931

MAIL

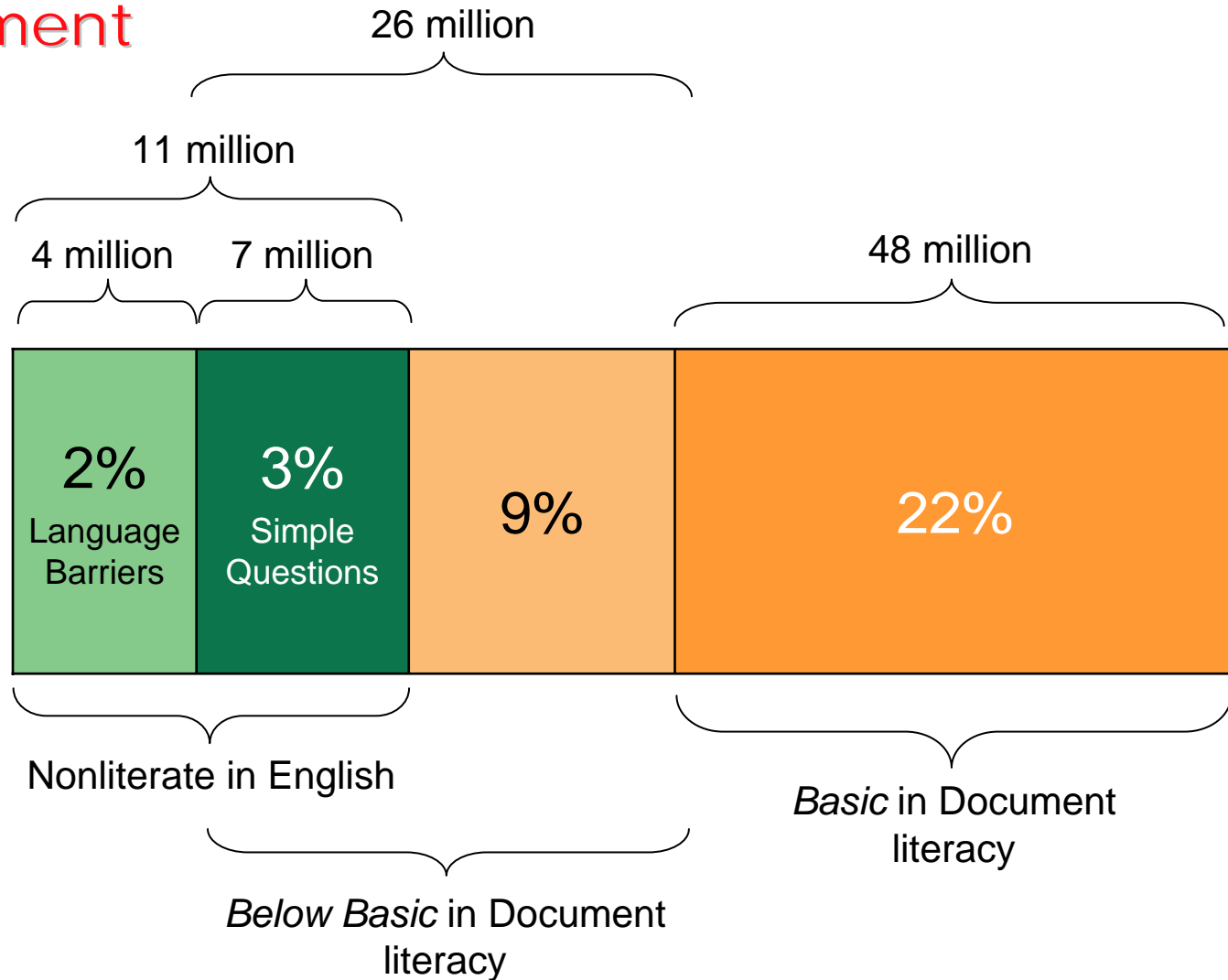
Percentage of adults *Nonliterate in English, Below Basic, and Basic* in **Prose** literacy: 2003

Prose



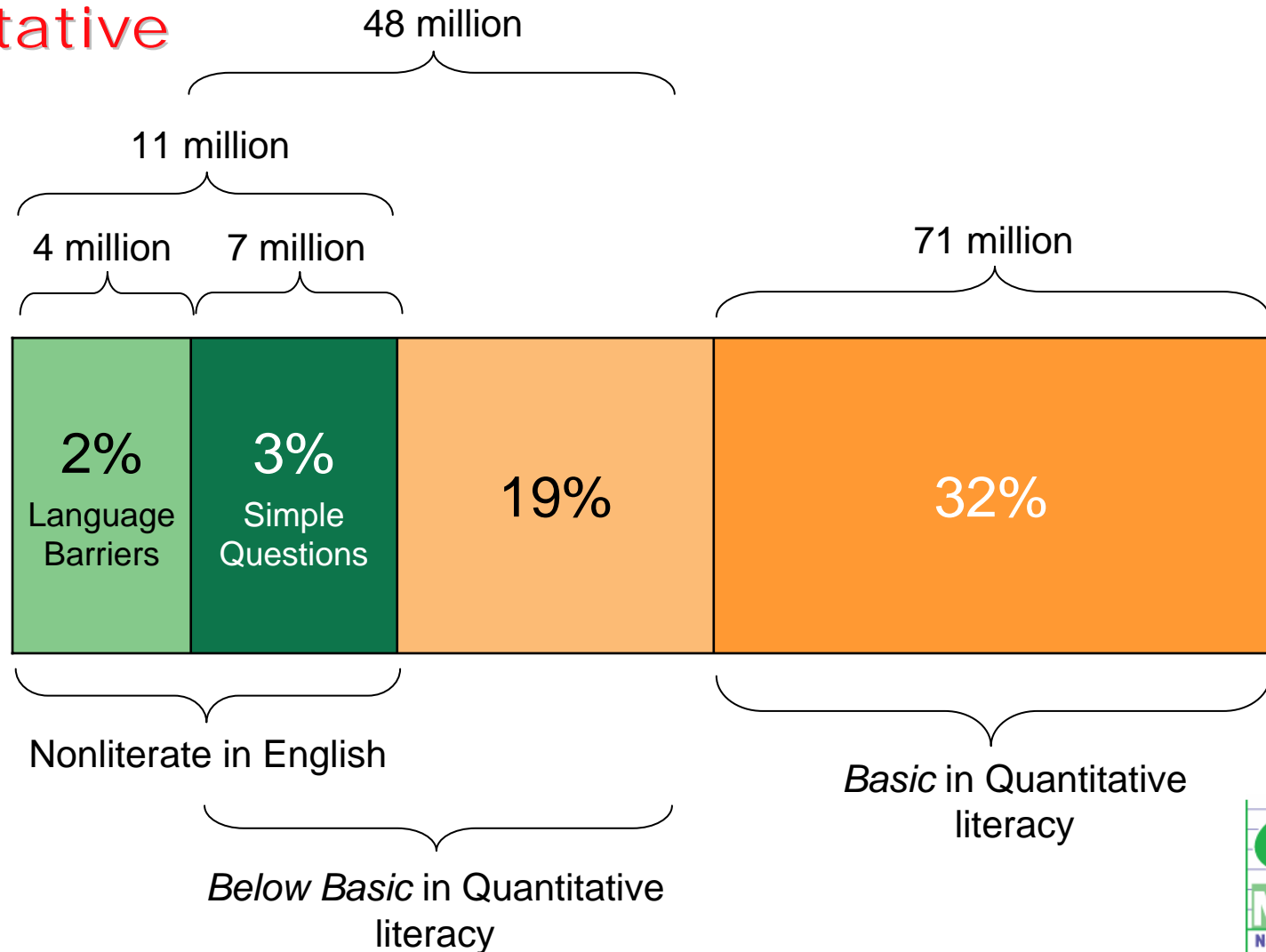
Percentage of adults *Nonliterate in English, Below Basic, and Basic* in **Document** literacy: 2003

Document



Percentage of adults *Nonliterate in English, Below Basic, and Basic* in **Quantitative** literacy: 2003

Quantitative



Characteristics of adults with *Below Basic* Document Literacy

Characteristic	Percent in <i>Below Basic</i> population	Percent in total population	Risk ratio
Did not graduate from high school	52	15	3.4
Did not speak English before starting school	37	13	2.8
Hispanic adults	34	12	2.7
Age 65+	33	15	2.2
Weekly earnings less than \$500 ¹	58	30	1.9
Black adults	21	12	1.8
One or more disabilities ²	50	30	1.7
Not employed full time ³	68	50	1.4

¹Weekly earning refers to the earning of full-time employed adults.

²Disabilities include vision, hearing, learning disability, and other health problems.

³Not employed full time includes employed part time, unemployed, and out of labor force. Adults who were employed but not at work when the 2003 NAAL was conducted were excluded."

NOTE: The risk ratio may not equal the ratio of percentages of *Below Basic* and total populations because of rounding of the percentages. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent) are excluded from this table.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Characteristics of adults with *Basic* Document literacy

Characteristic	Percent in Basic population	Percent in total population	Risk ratio
Black adults	18	12	1.6
Age 65+	22	15	1.4
Weekly earnings less than 500¹	42	30	1.4
Did not graduate from high school	20	15	1.3
Hispanic adults	14	12	1.2
One or more disabilities²	36	30	1.2
Not employed full time³	58	50	1.2
Did not speak English before starting school	15	13	1.1

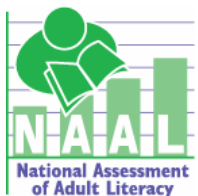
¹Weekly earning refers to the earning of full-time employed adults.

²Disabilities include vision, hearing, learning disability, and other health problems.

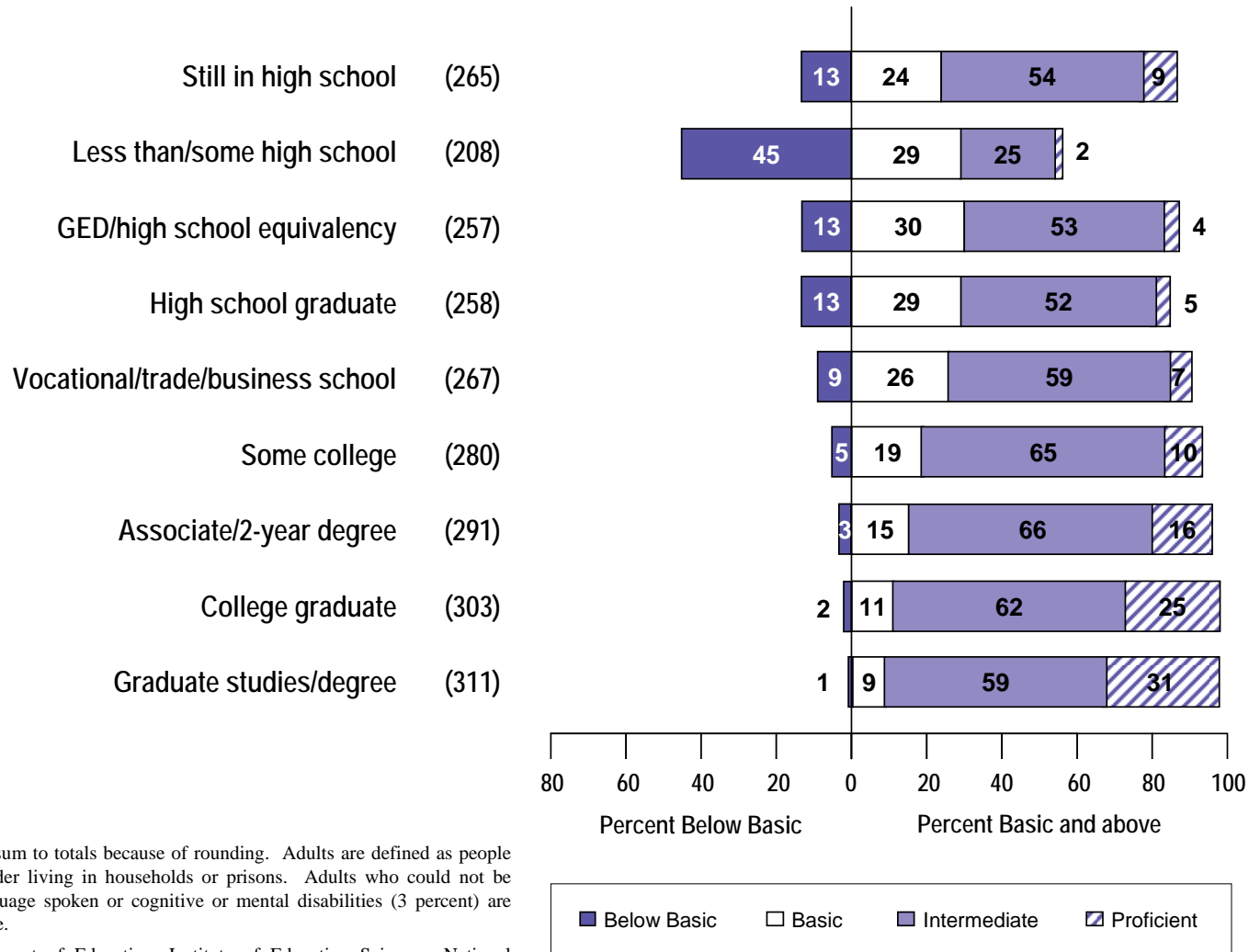
³Not employed full time includes employed part time, unemployed, and out of labor force. Adults who were employed but not at work when the 2003 NAAL was conducted were excluded.

NOTE: The risk ratio may not equal the ratio of percentages of *Basic* and total populations because of rounding of the percentages. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent) are excluded from this table.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.



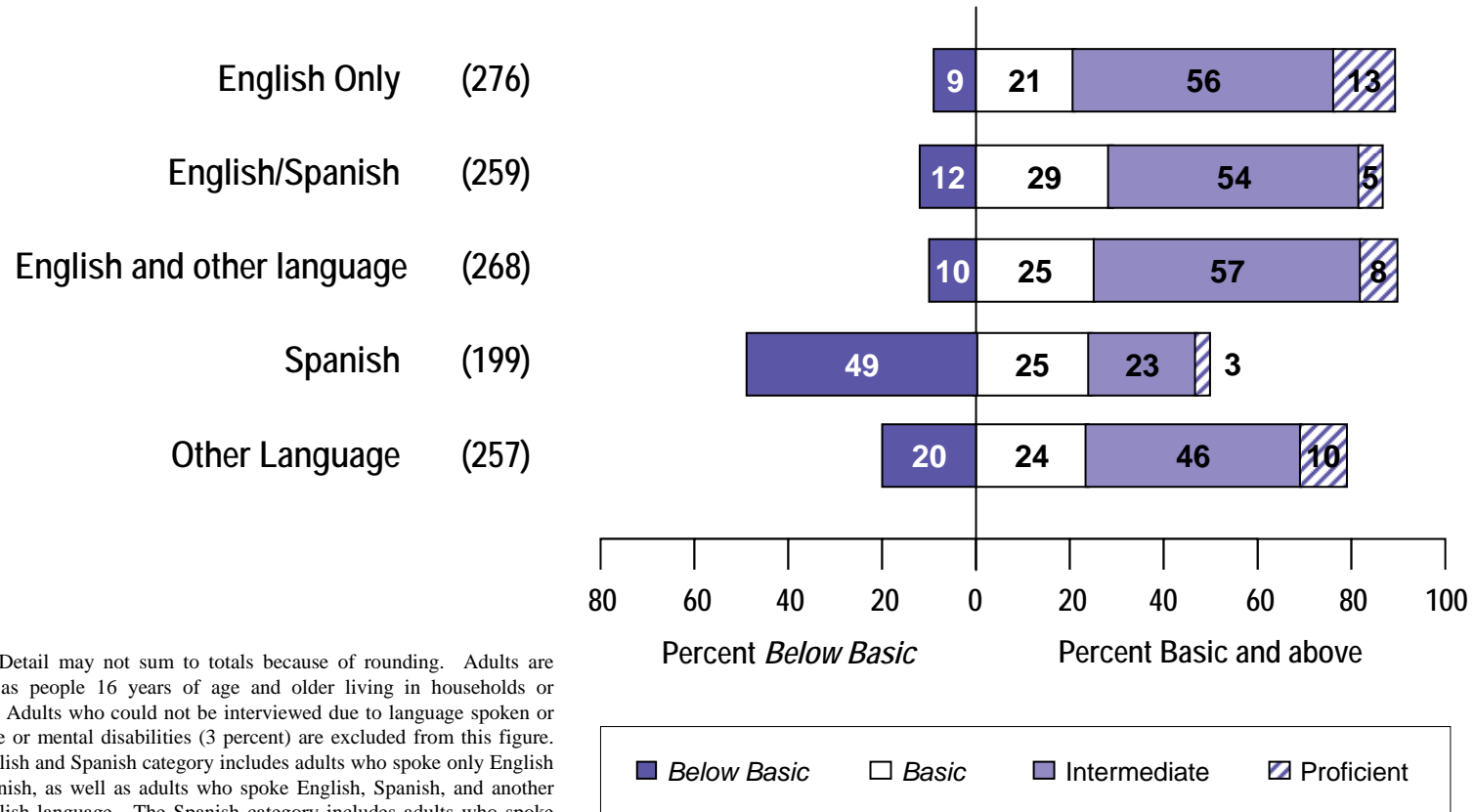
Percentage of adults in each document literacy level, by educational attainment: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

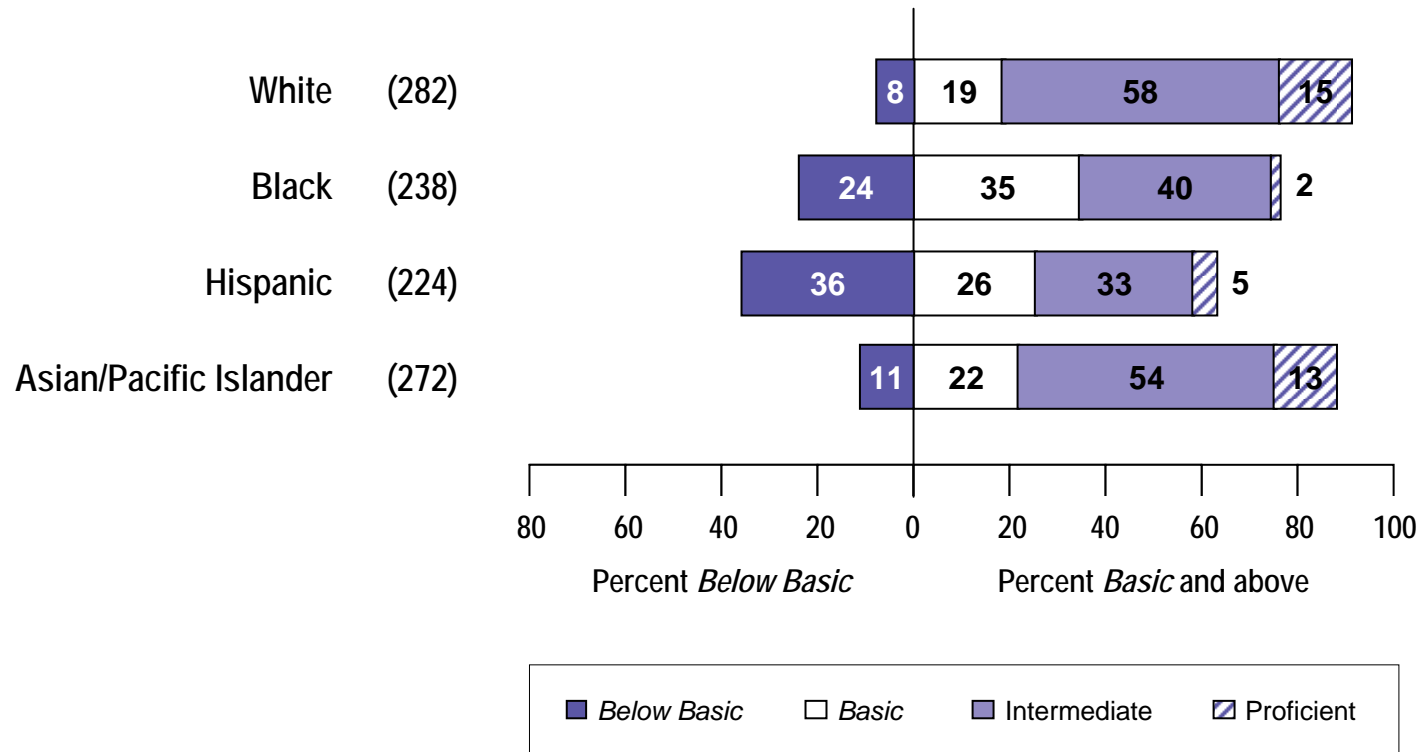
Percentage of adults in each document literacy level, by language spoken before starting school: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent) are excluded from this figure. The English and Spanish category includes adults who spoke only English and Spanish, as well as adults who spoke English, Spanish, and another non-English language. The Spanish category includes adults who spoke only Spanish, as well as adults who spoke Spanish and another Non-English language. The Other language category includes only adults who did not speak English or Spanish.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

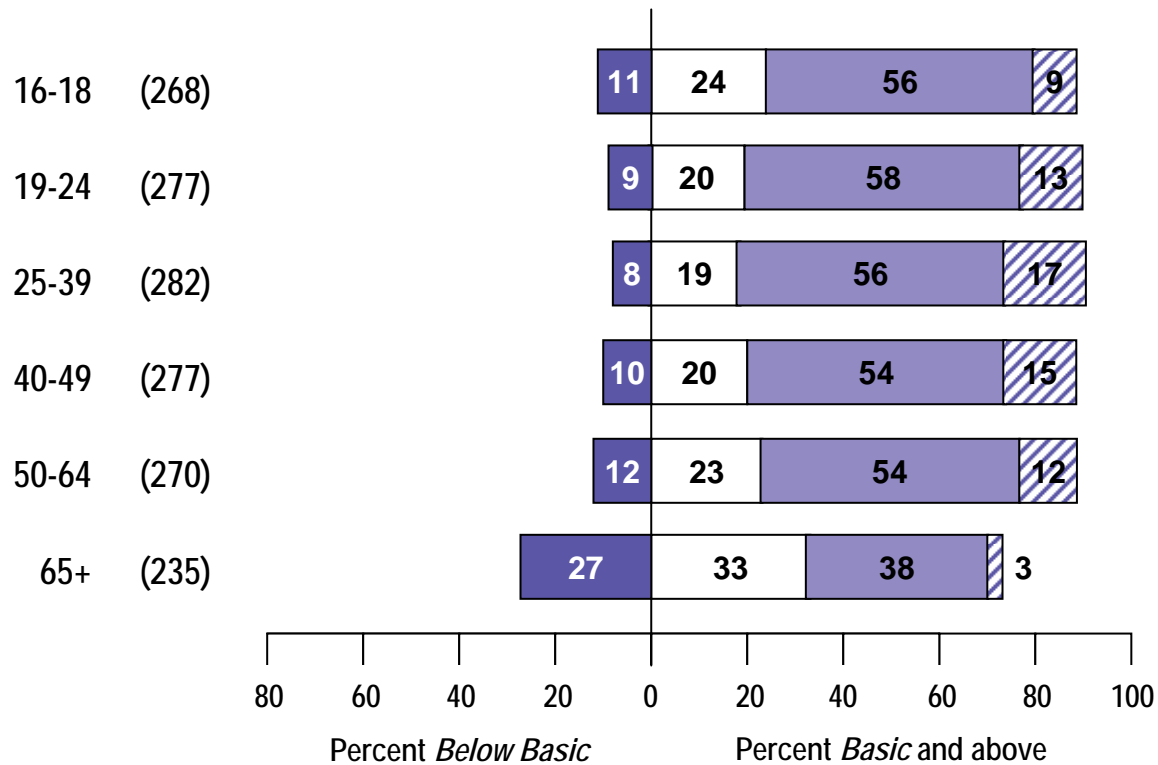
Percentage of adults in each document literacy level, by race/ethnicity: 2003



NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent) are excluded from this figure. In 2003, respondents were allowed to identify multiple races. In 2003, 2 percent of respondents identified multiple races and are not included in the White, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander categories in this figure. All adults of Hispanic origin are classified as Hispanic, regardless of race. The Asian/Pacific Islander category includes Native Hawaiians.

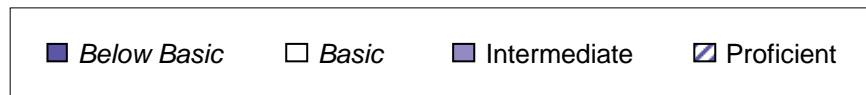
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Percentage of adults in each document literacy level, by age: 2003

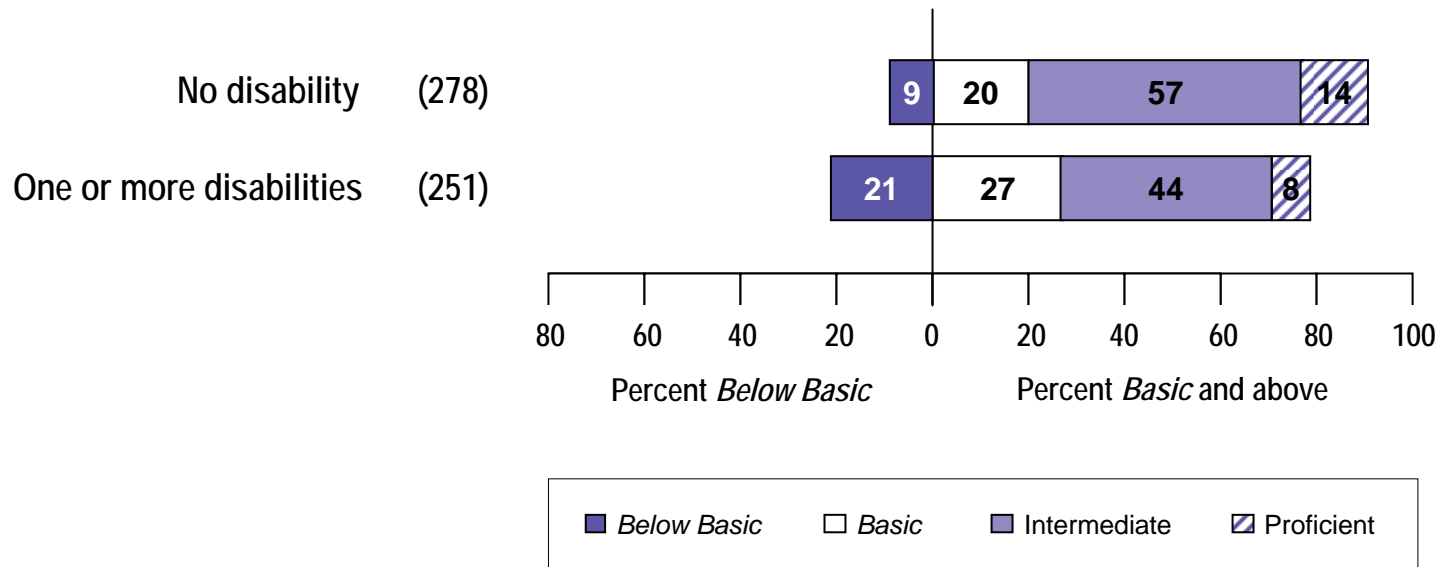


NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy



Percentage of adults in each document literacy level, by disability status: 2003



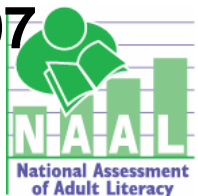
NOTE: Adults are defined as people 16 years of age and older living in households or prisons. Adults who could not be interviewed due to language spoken or cognitive or mental disabilities (3 percent) are excluded from this figure.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy.

Upcoming Reports

Expected Release

- The Health Literacy America's Adults: *Results from the health literacy component of the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy* **Summer 06**
- Literacy In Everyday Life: *A report of literacy in family, workplace, and community* **Fall 06**
- Literacy Behind Bars: *Report on a nationally representative sample of adult inmates in state and federal prisons.* **Winter 07**
- Basic Reading Skills and the Literacy of America's Least Literate Adults: *Report on the oral reading fluency and performance of a supplemental sample of the least literate adults.* **Spring 07**



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Implications for Adult Basic Education

- Adult Black-Hispanic-White Achievement Gap
- Importance of Quantitative Literacy (*aka “Numeracy”*)
- Age distribution of literacy skills
- What we know about the *Below Basic* and *Basic* adults – as readers

Implications for Workforce and National Competitiveness

- Literacy deficits have devastating consequences for individual workers, consigning them to low-wage jobs.
- Moreover, low literacy levels in workplace erode productivity and limit global competitiveness of US firms.

Implications for Workforce and National Competitiveness

- However, most employers have developed work-around strategies to manage the literacy deficits of their workers.
- Most employers say they are as concerned or even more concerned with other *workplace basic skills* as with literacy.

Implications for Workforce and National Competitiveness

- Employers are not getting much help now but just pushing generic literacy programs to firms will have little impact.
- Need new *demand side strategies* that focus broadly on basic workplace skills and use the workplace and the employer in the design and delivery of instructional programs.

Question and Answer Period

Thank you for joining us for today's webcast.
The webcast will be archived at our website:
<http://www.nifl.gov> in about a week.